

# HEALTH & SAFETY: ASPIRATION PREVENTION

## “Food Texture and Fluid Consistency Modification”

*BQIS/Outreach Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This document provides general information on the topic and is not intended to replace team assessment, decision making or medical advice. This is the first of ten Fact Sheets regarding Aspiration Prevention.*

### Objectives

Readers will gain an understanding of the rationale for modifying diets and the various types of available diet texture modifications.

### Definitions

#### FLUIDS

**Thin (Regular):** Regular fluids. No changes are necessary.

**Nectar-like:** Fluids thin enough to be sipped through a straw or from a cup but thick enough to fall off a tipped spoon slowly (e.g., buttermilk, eggnog like).

**Honey-like:** Thick fluids eaten with a spoon or sipped from a cup. Liquids are too thick to sip from straw. (e.g., thick yogurt, tomato sauce, room temperature honey).

**Pudding-like (Spoon thick):** Pudding like fluids that must be eaten with a spoon and that hold their shape on the spoon (e.g., thick milk pudding, thickened applesauce).

#### FOODS

*The modifications listed below are only a sample of the diet texture modifications available in the community. These may vary greatly and are often defined by the provider. Additional information regarding modified food textures is available on the “General Description of Diet Textures” handout.*

**Regular:** No modifications.

**Mechanical (#1) with Whole Sandwich Meat:** Sandwich meats are whole, other tougher meats and foods are chopped.

**Mechanical (#1) with Chopped Meat:** Tough foods are cut into small pieces, other items are whole.

**Mechanical (#2) Soft Diet – Ground Meat:** Soft textured foods that do not require chewing.

**Pureed:** Food blended into a smooth texture.

## Facts

- We need to thicken fluids because:
  - Thickened fluids help reduce the risk of liquid going into the windpipe or trachea, which leads to your lungs. Liquids in your lungs may cause pneumonia or a lung infection.
  - Thickened liquids move slower to give you better control of the liquids in the mouth so swallowing can occur more safely.
- We need to modify food textures because:
  - Modified diet textures are easier to chew and manipulate.
  - Requires less effort for those individuals who are easily fatigued.
- Diet Modification Concerns:
  - May reduce the individual's enjoyment of eating resulting in decreased oral intake that may lead to dehydration and possibly malnutrition.
  - The use of starch based thickeners increases carbohydrate intake, which may produce a nutritional imbalance and weight gain if the diet is not carefully monitored.
- There are two types of thickeners: Powder and Gel.

## Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Know the recommended liquid consistency needed (nectar, honey, pudding/spoon thick). Talk with the physician/speech language pathologist. Develop a plan.
2. If a thickener is needed for someone that is unsafe with food or thin liquids, determine which type of thickener is to be used. Discuss with the Physician to make sure there are no restrictions (allergies) to the type of thickener used.
3. Remember, beverages, thin soups, any liquid medication(s), and pureed food that have high water content will need to be thickened.
4. Ensure the product maintains the proper consistency prescribed. Check the consistency throughout the time of oral intake to ensure correct consistency.
5. Monitor weights when starting thickened liquids to see if the addition of the thickener has an effect on weight. If weight gain is to be avoided or if there is a medical condition that may be negatively impacted, (diabetes), try a thickener that has fewer calories.
6. Be positive and always encourage the person receiving thickened food or liquids.
7. Consult with the dietitian and physician regarding the type of thickener that should be used and recommendations for ordering, taking into consideration what insurance will cover.

## Learning Assessment

Questions that can be used to verify a person's competency in the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. Samples of fluid consistencies include:
  - A. Thin
  - B. Regular
  - C. Honey-Like
  - D. All of the Above

2. True or False: Only a Speech Pathologist should be notified when modifying a diet is considered.
3. True or False: If blended properly, Honey-like liquids may be sipped through a straw.
4. True or False: Modifying a person's diet texture results in food items that are able to be chewed more easily.

## References

James M Bailey MCD-CCC-SLP

Mary Jane Henrickson RD

Tara Ruff RD

Novartis Consumer Health. Hard to Swallow. Nutrition Matters. 2000

## Related Resources

Aspiration Prevention Series Fact Sheets: "Management of Constipation", "Management of Oral Health", "Dysphagia", "Modified Barium Swallow Study/ Videofluoroscopy", "Management of Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)", "Positioning", "Management of Residuals", "Feeding Tubes and Feeding/ Medication Administration Options", and "Choice Considerations Relevant to the Use of Enteral Nutrition"  
"General Description of Diet Textures" Handout

## Learning Assessment Answers

1. D
2. False
3. False
4. True

## Outreach Services

[outreach@fssa.in.gov](mailto:outreach@fssa.in.gov) • [DDRSOutreach.IN.gov](http://DDRSOutreach.IN.gov)

As a service for persons supporting individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities, BQIS/ Outreach developed the Outreach Fact Sheet Library. The information provided is designed to enhance the understanding of the topic and does not replace other professional or medical instructions or individually developed plans. For more fact sheets and information, please visit [DDRSOutreach.IN.gov](http://DDRSOutreach.IN.gov).



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